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ABSTRACT

A study identified young people's perceptions of types of activities and other factors at employer sites that lead to excellent and relatively poor learning experiences. Participants in the study were 1103 secondary students in 18 experience-based career education programs in 16 states. The questionnaire administered to the students included open-ended questions on student activities at the site and questions regarding the career being explored and personal career preference. Respondents indicated the degree to which they valued various factors that contributed to a community site being an excellent or poor learning experience. Findings showed that activities at learning sites considered excellent tended to include hands-on experiences, adults who were friendly and helpful, and tasks that had a moderate to high level of responsibility. Discriminant analyses of student responses were also conducted to show different value patterns related to sex, ethnic background, grade point average, and job preference. There were, however, no significant differences in the proportion of site experiences viewed as excellent by different categories of students. Implications for employers focused on improving student tasks--for education practitioners, on student needs and making employers aware of them; and for researchers, on studying paid work experiences and use of the indepth interview format. (YLB)

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Insuring Quality Learning in Employer Site Placements[1]

by

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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I. INTRODUCTION

Within the past decade educators and experts from many fields serving on national panels, commissions and task forces have focused on the problems of youth in our society. In looking at the difficulties young people experience making the transition from adolescence to adulthood, reports from these groups have criticized traditional secondary education for failing to provide today's youth with opportunities that develop a sense of responsibility and put them in meaningful relationships with adults in the community (Zajchowski, 1978).

Vocational and career development programs intended to improve youths' transition from school to work have become increasingly aware of the need to broaden the experiences of young people from the classroom to the greater community. Harry Silberman (1979) has argued that

> The location of vocational services should move increasingly to off-campus community sites for a variety of reasons: rapid equipment obsolescence and limited funds offer certain cost advantages to using the facilities of existing organizations in the community; the community offers a greater variety of adult role models, and provides greater age heterogeneity and a more communal learning environment; and realistic work settings can offer students enjoyable and interesting opportunities for authentic responsibility with which to test themselves. (p. 50)

Silberman goes on to argue that, although vocational education has historically been valued for its extrinsic benefits such as providing trained workers to fill jobs, an intrinsic perspective may be a more realistic view, particularly in a time of high unemployment when even trained workers may have difficulty finding a job. This intrinsic view values the enjoyment of the activities themselves, the role work can play

in life satisfaction, and the role of vocational education in promoting human development. Such a perspective may, in the long run, contribute more to the long-term employability of an individual than would teaching people only the skills needed for job entry. Therefore, it is important to look at what young people value in a particular job site so that these intrinsic benefits can be more fully developed.

In a recent analysis of National Longitudinal Study data from 1966, 1971 and 1975, Raelin (1980) found that initial job satisfaction was a key factor in predicting success in employment in later years. Programs for youth involving career explorations, work study placements or community internships are concerned about identifying job sites that will facilitate the greatest learning potential for youth. However, relatively little is known about what job site characteristics contribute the greatest learning experiences for various types of youth. With these concerns in mind, the Education and Work Program staff at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) designed and conducted research into this area.

Key questions that appeared important to us to address were:

- What job site characteristics do youth associate with an excellent or with a poor learning experience?
- What happens at these sites that contributes to or detracts from such learning?
- What specific learning occurs?
- What is the relationship between the student and the employer supervisor?
- How do the perceptions of youth differ by their age, sex, grade level, ethnic background, career aspiration, educational achievement and length of time they have participated in the program?

Over the past ten years NWREL, in conjunction with the National Institute of Education and three other regional educational laboratories, has been heavily involved in developing and validating an experiential education program called Experience-Based Career Education (EBCE). EBCE provides over 15,000 high school and college students in 49 states (Spotts, 1978) with a vital full- or part-time educational program that integrates academic learning, career experiences and life skill development through direct, supervised learning experiences in the community (Hagans, 1976). It was designed and is being used to serve a full cross-section of students. EBCE has been adapted to meet the special needs of various groups such as disadvantaged youth, gifted and talented, special education students, migrants, youth offenders (Wall, Hawkins, Lishner, Fraser, 1980) and adults in career transition.

For this study EBCE programs were selected because (1) they would insure a good cross-section of American youth, (2) EBCE student activities at employer sites were known and documented and (3) EBCE students average career explorations at from four to eight employer sites each. Thus, each student was likely to have experienced and could be asked to describe characteristics of sites where both excellent and poor learning had occurred.

A review of the literature on experiential learning convinced us that a foundation exists upon which to design a useful study. John Dewey (1950) has pointed out that not all experiences are learning experiences. For example, some experiences may be simply a routine repetition of other experiences (Geiger, 1978); the learner may fail to realize the meaning or significance of an experience (Combs, Avila and Purkey, 1971), its

relationship to other experiences or to previously learned concepts (Friedlander, 1965). Bandura (1977) and others developing Social Learning Theory have identified factors such as role modeling and reinforcement which research has shown to be related to increased learning (Krumboltz, Mitchell and Jones, 1976; Silberman and Hanelin, 1978). Others (Mitchell, Jones and Krumboltz, 1975) have applied propositions from Social Learning Theory to positive or negative influences on career decisions.

II. METHODS

Participants in this study consisted of 1,103 high school students enrolled in 18 high fidelity EBCE programs in 16 states. The EBCE programs were selected to give a balance across the four laboratory models of EBCE as well as geographic representation from each region of the country. Preference was also given to selecting some sites having a high minority enrollment. The population was 56 percent female and contained 65 percent white, 18 percent black, 11 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Native American and 1 percent Asian. Students reflected a normal distribution in grade point average. When analyzed by grade level, 46 percent were in the 12th grade, 38 percent in the 11th grade, 14 percent in the 10th grade and 1 percent in the 8th or 9th grade. Thirty percent of the students were in EBCE for their first semester and 70 percent had been enrolled for more than one semester.

Using critical incidents technique, open-ended questions and rating scales based primarily on propositions derived from social learning theory, a questionnaire was designed, pilot tested and revised. The

pilot instrument was administered to 218 students in eight EBCE programs covering five states. Based on information gained from that study (Owens and Owen, 1979) and from comments by a national review panel, the instrument was revised for use in the present study. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the two sets of rating scales assessing reasons for excellent or for poor learning experiences were .89 and .94.

Data from open-ended items asking students to describe briefly what they actually did at the high and at the low learning site were coded by a consultant into three levels of responsibility--high, moderate or low--based largely on the degree of consequences that would occur if the tasks were not performed or were inadequately handled. Data regarding the career they were exploring at the site and their personal career preference were both coded in terms of socioeconomic status (Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958) and occupational classification (Holland, 1973). Using Holland's hexagonal typology, a four-point congruence score was also calculated between the individual's personal career preference and the career being explored at the excellent and poor learning level sites.

SPSS, a social science oriented computer statistical package (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner and Bent, 1975; Hull and Nie, 1979) was used for the data analysis. CROSSTABS, MULT RESPONSE, T-TEST, ANOVA, PEARSON CORR, NPAR and DISCRIMINANT programs were run to obtain both descriptive and inferential statistics.

III. FINDINGS

General Findings

Respondents indicated the degree to which they valued various factors that may have contributed to a community site experience being an excellent or poor learning experience. For each factor or possible reason listed, they were asked to circle a number from 1=Not Significant to 5=Extremely Significant. Table 1 displays the reasons for a site being an excellent learning opportunity, mean ratings and standard deviations. Table 2 shows the reasons and the same types of data for a site being a poor learning opportunity.

A series of identical items were posed for both the high learning and poor learning site experiences. Five items asked the student to rate the extent of their agreement with statements concerning the interaction they had with a person on the site with whom they had a good relationship. In addition, open-ended items requested a description of the student's activities, what they learned and what happened at the site to make it the type of experience it was. Data from these items are summarized in Tables 3-8.

The remainder of this section is divided into general findings and findings based on analysis of subgroup characteristics. The results are organized into major topical areas.

Task Difficulty and Challenge. In Table 1, "easy tasks" (mean rating of 2.80) is ranked the lowest of any reason listed as to the significance of its contribution to excellent learning, and "challenging tasks," with a mean of 3.96, is ranked tenth out of 19, which suggests it was considered moderately important. For the poor learning factors (Table 2), "boring tasks" ranked as the most important factor listed in creating a poor learning experience (3.60). However, "tasks were too difficult" was the least important (2.10). Taken together, these item ratings indicate that most students feel they learn best at a job site when given appropriately challenging tasks to perform.

Hands-on Activities. "Trying out the work myself" (4.31) was the most important reason given for an excellent job site experience. Correspondingly, "no opportunity to try out the work myself" (3.27) was the fourth ranked factor resulting in little or no learning. It is evident from these items that students value the opportunity for hands-on job-related activities.

In addition, students were asked to describe briefly what they actually did at the site for both the excellent and poor learning sites. The results shown in Table 3 indicate a significantly greater proportion, ($p < .01$) of job-related, hands-on tasks for the excellent learning sites than for the poor learning sites (72 versus 52 percent). The findings just cited clearly indicate that the quality of learning in job site placement experiences is closely tied to the opportunity for students to perform job-related work themselves.

TABLE 1

RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REASONS WHY CERTAIN JOB SITE EXPERIENCES RESULTED IN EXCELLENT LEARNING

	Reasons	Mean*	S.D.*
1.	Trying out the work myself	4.31	0.83
2.	High effort by myself	4.31	0.84
3.	My skill in getting along with people	4.30	0.87
4.	Applying the learning to new things	4.15	0.87
5.	Listening and talking with adults at the site	4.14	0.81
6.	Being given an adult responsibility	4.14	0.89
7.	Clear directions to follow.	4.09	0.87
8.	Adult encouragement for doing the tasks well.	4.01	1.00
9.	Observing skilled adults doing certain tasks.	3.98	0.87
10.	Challenging tasks	3.96	0.91
11.	Adequate amount of time at site	3.90	0.99
12.	Learning the technical words and language associated with a career.	3.88	0.93
13.	Knowing ahead of time what will be expected of me	3.85	1.07
14.	Freedom to explore areas not planned in advance	3,82	1.00
15.	Supervisor took a personal interest in me	3.81	1.06
16.	Encouragement from family or friends.	3.67	1.14
17.	Luck in locating a good site	3.61	1.16
18.	Close adult supervision	2.93	1.21
19.	Easy tasks	2.80	1.23

*Means and standard deviations are based on a five-point rating scale where students were asked how significant they felt each of these reasons was in "helping to make a particular community experience an excellent learning opportunity for you." (1=Not Significant to 5=Extremely Significant)

TABLE 2

RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REASONS WHY CERTAIN JOB SITE EXPERIENCES RESULTED IN LITTLE OR NO LEARNING

Reasons	Mean*	S.D.*
1. Boring tasks	3.60	1.36
2. No opportunity to apply the learning to new things	3.29	1.31
3. No opportunity to explore other areas of interest	3.29	1.40
4. No opportunity to try out the work myself	3.27	1.47
5. Too much repetition of the activity	3.20	1.32
6. Didn't know what would be expected of me	3.03	1.31
7. No opportunities to observe skilled adults doing the tasks	3.00	1.42
8. No opportunity to talk to adults at the site	2.93	1.41
9. No adult recognition for doing the tasks well	2.88	1.36
10. No opportunity to discuss my experience with others	2.87	1.34
11. Ignored by my supervisor	2.76	1.47
12. Lack of clear directions to follow	2.72	1.37
13. Too closely supervised	2.60	1.29
14. Back luck at the site	2,59	1.40
15. Not enough time at site	2.54	1.44
16. Adult criticism of me or my work	2.46	1.35
17. Little effort by me	2.42	1.35
18. My lack of skill in getting along with people	2.36	1.39
19. Discouragement by family or friends	2.22	1.38
20. Tasks were too difficult	2.10	1.33

*Means and standard deviations are based on a five-point rating scale where students were asked how significant they felt each of these reasons was in "causing a particular community experience to result in little or no learning for you." (1=Not Significant to 5=Extremely Significant)

Responsibility. "Being given an adult responsibility" (mean rating of 4.14) ranked fifth among the 19 reasons listed as contributing to a successful learning experience in a job site placement. Thus, many of the respondents valued adult responsibility highly as a factor in their learning.

Table 3 indicates the level of responsibility* of the various job-related tasks described by respondents. While some students performed all three levels of tasks at both types of sites, the proportions are significantly different ($p < .01$). Proportionately, there were twice as many high responsibility tasks at the excellent learning sites and more than twice the proportion of moderate level tasks. Conversely, there were substantially more low responsibility tasks performed by respondents at the poor learning sites. Again, it is evident that having responsibility is important to young persons in a job site in order for them to perceive it as a positive learning experience.

Content of learning. Students were also asked to list the specific things they learned at each type of site. Table 4 displays the results of that item. These data indicate that, overall, proportionately more job-specific types of learning were listed for the high learning sites. However, for other types of learning such as self-understanding, the differences are relatively small. It is apparent that many of the learner outcomes do occur at both the excellent and poor sites. In-depth

*Responsibility levels were assigned by an independent consultant. The general criteria applied were (a) the presumed importance to the employer if the task were not performed or not performed correctly and (b) the degree of independence of thought or action required to perform the task.

TABLE 3

STUDENTS' REPORTED ACTIVITIES AT JOB SITES PROVIDING GOOD AND POOR LEARNING EXPERIENCES

	Excellent Learning Site		Poor Learning Site	
Job-related tasks.	72.1*		52.2	
High level of responsibility tasks.		15.3		7.6
Moderate level of responsibility tasks		39.5		18.1
Low level of responsibility tasks .		7.3		26.5
Non-job-related tasks.	26.1		31.9	
Interviewed people there		10.2		9.2
Toured		7.5		7.1
Observed, studied, listened.		8.4		15.6
Did nothing/no chance to do anything . .	0.0		14.1	
Other.	1.8		1.8	
	100.0		100.0	

*Percentage of item responses

TABLE 4

TYPES OF LEARNING STUDENTS REPORTED AT JOB SITES
PROVIDING GOOD AND POOR LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Response Categories*	Excellent Learning Site	Poor Learning Site
Job-specific skills (other than use of tools or equipment).	36.5**	27.3
Use of tools and equipment	15.0	11.3
How the job works; specific procedures .	15.7	14.3
Responsibility/maturity involved in that job	6.5	3.8
Understanding of myself/my own interests	4.8	5.4
Understanding of others.	9.2	4.0

*All response categories were included that contained a minimum of 4 percent of the responses for this item.

**Percentage of item responses

interviews at one site indicated that sometimes greater understanding of self or others can occur at a site in which little job-related learning occurred.

Relationship with adults at the sites. For both excellent and poor learning sites, students were asked to indicate on a five-point scale (1=Strongly Agree to 5=Strongly Disagree) the extent of their agreement with five statements. These statements were descriptive of the possible nature of their relationship with someone at the site with whom they had developed "a really good relationship" (Table 5). In addition, they were asked to estimate the number of people they "worked closely" with at the site.

The mean responses for the excellent learning sites were significantly ($p < .001$) higher than the mean responses for the poor learning sites. Thus, youth tended to agree more with the positive relationship statements in the excellent learning sites. Additionally, the mean number of persons with whom respondents worked closely was significantly higher in the high learning sites (a mean of 5.40 versus 2.66, $p < .001$). Finally, when describing the things that occurred at the excellent sites to enhance the quality of learning, 28 percent of the responses indicated respondents "worked with friendly/helpful people."

These data are evidence for youth learning best in an environment where there are positive relations with adults. The data may also be viewed as confirmation of the concept of mentorship, where the student works closely with one or more job site supervisors.

TABLE 5

STUDENTS' EXTENT OF AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS CONCERNING A PERSON WITH WHOM HE OR SHE FORMED A GOOD RELATIONSHIP

	Excellent Learning Sites		Poor Learning Sites		Significance of t-test
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
We liked each other. . . .	1.67*	0.63	2.05	0.92	.001
That person and I talked about things besides work like sports, hobbies, personal things.	1.82	0.93	2.32	1.24	.001
That person respected and trusted me	1.64	0.70	2.17	0.99	.001
That person and I talked about my future plans. .	1.81	0.97	2.49	1.26	.001
That person and I talked about what was happening at the site.	1.56	0.76	2.13	1.16	.001

*These numbers are based on a five-point rating scale where 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=not sure, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree. Therefore, a mean of 1.67 indicates most people agreed or strongly agreed with the statements.

Time on Site. Respondents estimated the amount of time they spent at both the excellent and poor sites. The median* response was 30 hours at the excellent learning site and 14 hours at the poor learning site.

Within the structure of EBCE, students generally start by engaging in brief career exploration activities at employer sites. Students are then able to select sites for more in-depth work on learning projects following career explorations. They generally choose to return or continue at those sites where they initially had an excellent career exploration experience. Thus, the difference in hours spent at excellent and poor learning sites generally reflects different purposes and activities at these two types of sites.

Subgroup Analysis

Although it is useful to know the perceptions of young people in general about the nature of their relationship with an employer supervisor and about reasons they feel may have caused a particular community experience to result in excellent or poor learning, it is even more important to understand how various types of youth differ in their experiences and values. Further light was shed on this question by conducting discriminant analyses of student responses. Youth were classified along eight dimensions--sex, ethnicity, grade level, grade point average, career preference using Holland's typology, the socioeconomic status of their career preference, the congruence between their personal career preference and the specific career they were exploring at a particular employer site, and the length of time they had participated in EBCE.

*Numbers were grouped together in categories, so the mean response is unavailable.

The dependent variables used in the discriminant analyses were grouped into three clusters for ratings about excellent learning sites and three clusters for ratings about poor learning sites. The three clusters were items dealing with a youth's interaction with the community supervisor, job site characteristics and factors associated with attribution theory (Bar-tal, 1978). Results and discussion related to attribution theory will be presented in a separate paper. Only those factors relating to excellent or poor learning sites that produced significant differences ($p < .05$) using one-way ANOVA among categories of students were entered into the discriminant analyses.

Table 6 displays the way various types of students differ in their perceived relationship with their community supervisor. EBCE students responded on scaled items to five statements about their relationship with their community supervisor at a site where they felt they had an excellent learning opportunity and to the same statements for a site where they felt they learned little or nothing. At sites where they felt they had an excellent learning opportunity, students who had been in EBCE for more than one semester were more likely to have discussed their future plans with their supervisor than were students in EBCE for their first semester. Hispanic and white students were more likely than black students to have talked with their supervisor about "what was happening at the site" and about "things besides work such as sports, hobbies and personal things."

TABLE 6

STUDENT RATINGS ABOUT INTERACTIONS WITH THEIR EMPLOYER SUPERVISOR
AT EXCELLENT AND POOR LEARNING SITES
ANALYZED BY STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

RATINGS ABOUT THE STUDENT'S INTERACTION WITH THE EMPLOYER SUPERVISOR AT EXCELLENT (E) AND POOR (P) LEARNING SITES		STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS							
		Sex	Ethnicity	Grade Level	Grade Point Average	Career Type	Career SES	Career Congruence	Time In Program
We liked each other.	E								
	P			*					
That person and I talked about things besides work like sports, hobbies and personal things.	E	***							
	P								
That person respected and trusted me.	E								
	P								
That person and I talked about my future plans.	E	***	**					**	
	P			**					
That person and I talked about what was happening at the site.	E	***							
	P					*			

*=Wilks Lambda F ratio significant with *= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$; ***= $p < .001$

Table 7 displays the way various types of students differ in perception of selected employer site characteristics as leading to excellent learning. Students in EBCE responded on scaled items to statements indicating possible reasons that a particular community experience may have been an excellent learning opportunity for them. Having "challenging tasks" to do at the site was rated as more important by students in twelfth grade than by those in grades nine to eleven. Students preferring scientific or artistic careers valued "challenging tasks" more highly than did those preferring careers in teaching or clerical occupations. Being given "adult responsibilities," "challenging tasks" and "opportunities to apply learning to new things" were valued more highly by students interested in scientific careers than by those interested in careers requiring mechanical ability. Students preferring white collar careers valued "challenging tasks" and "applying learning to new things" more so than did those interested in blue collar careers. However, there were no significant differences among such students in valuing "adult responsibility" or "close adult supervision." Students with higher grade point averages valued "adult responsibility" and "challenging tasks" while those with lower grade point averages more highly valued "close adult supervision." Hispanic students valued "close adult supervision" more than did other ethnic groups.

TABLE 7

STUDENT RATINGS OF REASONS MAKING AN EMPLOYER SITE AN EXCELLENT LEARNING OPPORTUNITY ANALYZED BY STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

REASONS	Sex	Ethnicity	Grade Level	Grade Point Average	Career Type	Career SES	Career Congruence	Time In Program
Being given an adult responsibility			**	**				
Challenging tasks	***	*	**	**	*			
Close adult supervision	***		**					
Applying the learning to new things				*	*			

*=Wilks Lambda F ratio significant with *=p<.05; **=p<.01; ***=p<.001

Table 8 displays the ways various types of students differ in perception of selected employer site characteristics as leading to poor learning. Ratings by students regarding sites where they felt little or no learning had occurred indicated that students in EBCE longer than one semester were more likely to attribute the lack of learning to "boring tasks," "no opportunity to discuss experiences with others," "no adult recognition for doing the tasks well," "no opportunity to try out the work," "lack of clear directions to follow" and "no opportunity to explore other areas of interest."

Students interested in scientific or clerical careers were more likely to attribute little or no learning to the lack of "opportunity to explore other areas of interest." Students interested in careers involving sales or clerical ability were more likely than those interested in artistic careers to attribute little or no learning to "boring tasks." Females were more likely than males to attribute little or no learning at community sites to lack of "opportunity to explore other areas of interest" and lack of "opportunity to try out the work."

Students with a lower grade point average more frequently reported "no opportunity to discuss one's experiences with others," "no adult recognition for doing the tasks well" and "discouragement by family or friends." "No opportunity to try out the work" was reported as a significant problem more frequently by students with a higher grade point average. Hispanic students, more frequently than Native Americans or whites, attributed little or no learning to being "too closely supervised," lack of "opportunity to discuss experiences with others," "no adult recognition for doing the tasks well" and "adult criticism."

TABLE 8

STUDENT RATINGS OF REASONS MAKING AN EMPLOYER SITE
A POOR LEARNING OPPORTUNITY ANALYZED
BY STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

REASONS	Sex	Ethnicity	Grade Level	Grade Point Average	Career Type	Career SES	Career Congruence	Time In Program
Boring tasks		***		*				***
Too close supervision		**	***					
No opportunity to discuss my experiences with others		***	**	**				*
No adult recognition for doing the tasks well		**	***	**				**
Adult criticism of me or my work		**	***					
No opportunity to try out the work myself	*		**	**	*			**
Lack of clear directions to follow			***					*
No opportunity to explore other areas of interest	**		***		*			***
Discouragement by family or friends		***	***	**				

*=Wilks Lambda F ratio significant with *=p <.05; **=p <.01; ***=p <.001

Both Hispanics and blacks reported "discouragement by family or friends" as a more significant factor than was reported by American Indians or whites.

All nine reasons listed for poor learning sites were rated as significantly more of a causal factor by students in higher grade levels. Responses by grade level were linear; that is, seniors were more critical than juniors, juniors more so than sophomores, etc.

IV. DISCUSSION

Graham (1975), basing his views on Dewey's philosophy of experiential learning, states that:

> It is the nature of the experience and its match with the needs of the individual that determines whether it is good or bad and whether it will tend to lead on to other good experiences. Systematic efforts to make this kind of match have not been common in action-learning programs, in large part because of the difficulty of assessing the important characteristics of the individual and of the experiential situation. (pp. 192-193)

The research reported in this paper is a preliminary attempt to contribute to an understanding of the various reasons different young people associate with excellent or poor learning at employer sites in the community. Although some interesting value patterns have emerged from this study regarding various categories of youth, overall there were no significant differences in the proportion of employer site experiences that various groups of youth viewed as excellent learning experiences. Regardless of sex, race, grade level, grade point average or occupational preference, students in Experience-Based Career Education considered two-thirds of their employer site experiences as having produced

excellent learning opportunities. This suggests that community-based experiential learning has the potential for benefiting most students although the experiences encountered and the meaning attached to these experiences is never identical for any two students.

The employer site characteristics selected as contributing most to excellent learning experiences in this study were "trying out the work myself," "applying learning to new things," "being given adult responsibility," "listening and talking with adults at the site," "clear directions to follow," and "adult encouragement for doing tasks well." Each of these characteristics was also rated in the top eight out of 19 reasons in an earlier study conducted with 218 EBCE students in different sites in 1978 (Owens and Owen, 1979). Mangum and Walsh (1978), in a review of employment and training programs for youth, also noted the importance of good adult supervision and well defined tasks that youth see as having a purpose. Their advice for improving job quality included "do not place enrollees in ill-defined jobs which require little supervision, make few demands on the enrollee and which have little relationship to the real world of work" (p. 73).

Diane Hedin and Dan Conrad recently completed a comprehensive study of 4,000 students in 30 high school experiential education programs (Hedin and Conrad, 1979). These programs were classified as adventure education, community service, career internships and community study/political action. Vocational, EBCE and work-related programs were excluded by these researchers because such programs had already been extensively evaluated. On one of their post-program questionnaires

students were asked to select the specific characteristics best describing their field experience. "Had adult responsibilities," "made important decisions" and "did things myself" were rated as the top three characteristics listed by non-CETA program youth. The top three listed by CETA youth were "given clear directions," "did things myself" and "made important decisions" (Hedin, 1979, p. 27). "Had adult responsibilities" was not among the top ten characteristics listed by CETA youth. This present study included only one CETA program using EBCE.

In the CETA program using EBCE, "clear directions to follow" was ranked second out of 19 reasons why an employer site was an excellent learning experience. For the non-CETA programs, it was ranked seventh. Across all programs we found that adult responsibility was valued significantly higher by students with higher grade point average, while "close adult supervision" was valued more by students with lower grade point average.

Not all employer site experiences lead to productive learning. It is essential, therefore, that we learn about what detracts from excellent learning. In this study the main reasons selected by students for little or no learning were "boring tasks," "no opportunity to apply learning to new things," "no opportunity to explore other areas of interest," "no opportunity for hands-on learning" and "too much repetition of the activity." In the earlier study of 218 students at other EBCE sites in 1978, the exact same five reasons were the top five out of 20 reasons selected by students. This helps confirm that present findings can be generalized to other EBCE programs. These findings are consistent with those reported in Work in America, where oppressive features of work were

found to be "constant supervision and coercion," "lack of variety," "monotony," "meaningless tasks" and "isolation" (Special Task Force to the Secretary of HEW, 1973, p. 13).

Not all students value the same conditions at employer sites. For example, students who prefer jobs having a higher socioeconomic status and those preferring scientific (investigative) or artistic careers value "challenging tasks" more highly than others. In the 1979 study we also found significant differences in valuing "challenging tasks" on the part of students preferring careers with a higher socioeconomic status. In looking at the personality characteristics associated with investigative careers, Holland (1973) found such people describing themselves as curious, intellectual and analytical. Similarly, people interested in artistic careers were more likely to be imaginative, independent and intuitive. Thus, it is understandable that people interested in these career types would value challenging tasks more than people interested in conventional careers where people are more often characterized as practical and unimaginative (Holland, 1973, pp. 14-18).

The length of time a person is enrolled in an experiential program also plays an important role in influencing what they value as leading to an excellent learning experience. The earlier study of EBCE found that students who were enrolled for a greater length of time in EBCE attached increased importance to discussing their experiences with others. In the present study the lack of "opportunity to discuss experiences with others" was rated significantly more important in contributing to a lack of learning by students in EBCE for more than one semester.

Another student characteristic that helps to influence what youth do and value in their employer site experiences is ethnic background. For example, Hispanic and white students were more likely than black students to have talked with their supervisor about what was happening at the site and about personal things. This may be influenced by the fact that part of our Hispanic population was in an EBCE program in Puerto Rico. At this site, students were somewhat stronger than the national average in agreeing that they talked with their supervisor about what was happening at the site and significantly stronger in agreeing that they talked about personal things. With these Hispanic youth and with white youth, the ethnic background of the student and the employer was more likely to be the same whereas black students were often engaged in learning experiences with white employers. In cases where the student and employer are of different ethnic backgrounds, there may be a greater need for program staff to encourage employers to spend time talking with students both about things happening at the work site as well as about personal things which often give insights into the personality differences of people in various jobs.

V. IMPLICATIONS

Preliminary implications from the findings in this study are presented below as recommendations to employers, educators or those working with students, and to other researchers. These implications will be revised after discussions with members of these three audiences.

Employers

- Provide youth in job placements with opportunities to interact with and work closely with one or more adults at the site.
- Allow youth in job site placements to try out actual job-related tasks themselves.
- Allow youth at job site placements to perform some tasks which may be considered "adult responsibility" tasks that are important to and taken seriously by the business or agency.
- In cooperation with the learning or educational counselor or coordinator and the youth, identify the appropriate types and levels of tasks so that not all tasks will be "too easy" or boring and repetitive.
- At job sites where students indicated they had had an excellent learning experience, there was strong feeling that their supervisor respected and trusted them and that the supervisor talked, not only about what was happening at the job site, but also about the youth's future career plans and about personal things.

Educational Practitioners

- Orient job site supervisors to the needs of students to:

  -Interact with and work closely with adults at the job site.

  -Take on some "real" responsibility.

  -Have hands-on experiences with job-related tasks.

  -Perform moderately challenging tasks.

- Work with youth to identify the appropriate types and levels of tasks they can perform.
- Work with job site supervisors to identify various levels of hands-on tasks and responsibilities that young persons might perform at their site.
- Work with job site supervisors and young persons to match students' skills and needs with available opportunities at a particular job site.

Researchers

- A similar type of study should be conducted with respondents who are at job site placements for paid work experience. The present study utilized high school students who were primarily engaged in career exploration for credit.

- Utilizing an indepth interview format and observations, it would be useful to thoroughly explore the perceptions of youth as to what constitutes an excellent or a poor learning experience. In the questionnaire format, respondents were unable to clearly articulate the things which occurred at the learning sites and the meaning they attached to them.

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